



February 13th, 2023

Re: Black and Brown United in Action testimony in support of HB 6616

Dear Senator Lesser, Senator Herron, Representative Dathan, Representative Gilchrest and members of the Human Services Committee:

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization which focuses on immigrant rights, worker's rights, women's rights, and all matters which adversely affect the lives of Black and Brown people in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of HB 6616, An Act Concerning the Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status.

As you know, the United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world. About 40 million people who live here were born in a different country. Around a third of them are undocumented, almost half do not have health coverage and most of those without health coverage are children. According to research conducted by New American Economy, in 2018 undocumented immigrants contributed \$20.1 billion in federal taxes and \$11.8 billion in state and local taxes. Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) allow those without social security numbers — including the undocumented — to pay taxes. According to the Taxpayer Advocacy Service (an internal IRS accountability office), in 2015 ITIN filers paid an estimated \$23.6 billion in total taxes. The tax contributions of undocumented immigrants are critical to the viability of public health programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Between 2000 and 2011, undocumented immigrants generated a \$35.1 billion surplus in the Medicare Trust Fund. States that spend the most in emergency medical care for undocumented immigrants (California, Texas, and New York) all also receive over \$1 billion in state and local tax contributions from undocumented immigrants each year.

Despite this, undocumented immigrants compose the largest group of uninsured individuals in the country, with an estimated 45% to 71% of them lacking health coverage. Generally, many illegal immigrants receive primary care and prescription drugs for a sliding-scale fee at over 1000 federally funded health care centers spread across nearly 11,000 communities. Those centers are required to treat anyone, regardless of ability to pay, and administrators do not ask patients about their citizenship status. Some undocumented residents receive coverage through their own or a spouse's employer-provided plan, though they are less likely than legal residents or citizens to have jobs with employer coverage. Given that it is expensive to poor in Connecticut, what happens when it becomes too expensive to maintain your health?

Also to be considered are the many unspoken heroes who worked late hours while the world figured out how to contend with COVID-19. At Dunkin' Donuts, McDonald's, gas stations, rest stops, cleaners, domestic work, farm work, factory work and the many others who did menial yet very important tasks which proved to be quite important. That historic health pandemic should have reminded us why access to healthcare is important, and that it can get costly, which in itself is a deterrent to good health. Migrating to another country has an effect, including being in a changed atmosphere which can uncover ailments that require consistent managed care such as chronic asthma, which is handled with medication and can get quite costly. Considering today's economy, having to pay out of pocket healthcare expenses comes along with deciding whether to pay a utility bill or buy eggs at the same time.

Right here in Connecticut, access to HUSKY was expanded to children ages 0 -12, and we want it to be expanded to age 26. There will still be work to be done after that happens. Specifically, Husky C needs to be expanded so all immigrants have access to healthcare including to parents and individuals regardless of their age. Investing in the wellness of society affords the state healthy communities, and a more sustainable future. Black and Brown United in Action recognizes that healthcare is a human right and that undocumented immigrants make many notable contributions to society, work hard and incur heavy cost of living expenses. We ask that you pass HB 6616 as a step toward encouraging community wellness and supporting healthy communities.

In closing, as you listen to the testimonies being shared, we urge you to consider the viability of democracy when someone who does not speak English as a first language or needs communication support services such as sign language is only afforded 3 mins to share their testimony. Kindly acknowledge that access to healthcare includes being able to effectively and efficiently share thought, which will prove difficult if there is a lack of resources and time, both of which can feel like a cage to someone who is only trying to share their story. We appreciate the time, effort and courage which you put into your work to represent us, and are asking for you to consider how improving language and time access will increase our participation and support of your endeavors of improving our communities during the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Black and Brown United in Action